

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /034 W

-----270707Z 059668 /17

R 260945Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3357

INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, BG

SUBJ: UNIT PARISHAD ELECTIONS

REF: DACCA 0163

1. THE UNION PARISHAD ELECTIONS ARE NOW ABOUT TWO THIRDS COMPLETE AND ALL BUT A FEW WHICH HAVE BEEN DELAYED FOR ADMINISTRATIVE REASONS ARE TO BE OVER ON JANUARY 31.

2. THE PRESS HAS GIVEN A SMATTERING OF RESULTS. IT WILL BE SOME TIME BEFORE THE BDG CAN MAKE AN INTERNAL ANALYSIS FOR ITS OWN USE OR ACADEMIC OBSERVERS WILL BE ABLE TO COME TO CONCLUSIONS. AT LEAST TWO NEWSPAPERS, THE BANGLADESH TIMES AND ITTEFAQ, ACCORDING TO THEIR RESPECTIVE EDITORS, ENAYETULLAH KHAN AND ANWAR HOSSAIN (MANJU), LULL ATTEMPT SURVEYS USING THE RESOURCES OF THEIR REPORTERS IN THE MOFUSSIL AREAS (ONLY RURAL UNION COMMITTEES ARE BEING ELECTED; MUNICIPAL AND TOWN COMMITTEES MAY BE ELECTED LATER BUT THIS HAS NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED BY THE GOVERNMENT).

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3. DESPITE THE LACK OF FIRM INFORMATION, HOWEVER, A FEW GENERAL IMPRESSIONS CAN BE REPORTED ON THE BASIS OF OBSERVATION BY MEMBERS OF THE MISSION WHO HAVE TRAVELLED OUTSIDE THE CITY AND CONVERSATIONS WITH A VARIETY OF BANGLADESHIS, SOME OF WHOM RETURNED TO VILLAGES TO CAST THEIR VOTES.

A. THE TURNOUT HAS BEEN HEAVY. SOME PLACES HAVE REPORTED AS HIGH AS NINETY PERCENT, ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE THIS TO BE ATYPICAL AND A MORE GENERAL AVERAGE WOULD BE NEAR SEVENTY PERCENT.

B. CAMPAIGNING HAS BEEN VIGOROUS, BUT ALMOST WITHOUT EXCEPTION IT HAS BEEN PEACEFUL. CANDIDATES HAVE SPENT SOME FUNDS, PARTICULARLY ON CAMPAIGN POSTERS AND LITERATURE.

C. THE FEARED DISRUPTION OF THE POLLING BY "MISCREANTS" AND OTHER "BAD CHARACTERS" HAS NOT OCCURRED. THERE HAVE VIRTUALLY NO INCIDENTS REPORTED WHICH ARE LINKED DIRECTLY TO THE ELECTION.

D. ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS HAVE GENERALLY BEEN GOOD. ONE COMPLAINT HEARD IS THAT THERE HAVE BEEN INSUFFICIENT POLLING BOOTHS IN SOME AREAS, BUT THIS HAS BEEN OVERCOME BY EXTENDING POLLING HOURS, ALTHOUGH AT SOME INCONVENIENCE TO THE VOTERS.

4. REPORTS ON RESULTS ARE NOT INCOMPLETE AGREEMENT. SOME HAVE TOLD US THAT AWAMI LEAGUERS ARE POLLING WELL WHILE OTHERS MAINTAIN THAT THERE IS A RETURN TO THE MUSLIM LEAGUE WHICH HAS BEEN ABLE TO SHED ITS IMAGE OF A PARTY OF AYUB, YAHYA AND PAKISTAN. THE CANDIDATES RUN ON A NON-PARTY BASIS. ALTHOUGH DISAGREEING ON WHICH PARTY'S ADHERENTS ARE IN FIRST PLACE, MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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JSD TO BE IN THIRD SOME DISTANCE BACK. SEVERAL HAVE TOLD US THAT IN THEIR OBSERVATION CANDIDATES ELECTED HAVE BEEN YOUNGER AND BETTER EDUCATED THAN IN 1973 AND EARLIER ELECTIONS. FROM THIS THEY CONCLUDE THAT THE GROUP MAY BE MORE DEMANDING OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN MATTERS OF DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF EXISTING SERVICES.

5. IT IS TOO EARLY FOR US TO DRAW SIMILAR CONCLUSIONS OR TO REFUTE THESE. ZIA HAS STATED HIS HOPE THAT THE NEW CLASS OF UNION PARISHAD MEMBER WILL BE CAPABLE OF ASSISTING IN HIS PLANS FOR BANGLADESH. BDG OFFICIALS AND OTHERS, DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN, ARE WAITING TO SEE THE PATTERNS THAT EMERGE.
MASTERS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 26-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977DACCA00443
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770029-0426
Format: TEL
From: DACCA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770118/aaaaapbj.tel
Line Count: 111
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: b53308d1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 DACCA 163
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3499901
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: UNIT PARISHAD ELECTIONS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, BG
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b53308d1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009